

Statement of Senator Jean Carnahan
Senate Commerce Committee
Hearing on Election Reform
March 9, 2001

Thank you Senator McCain and Senator Hollings for
convening these hearing on this most important subject.

Voting is a fundamental right of Americans, and one of the
cornerstones of our nation's democracy.

In the 1964 decision Reynolds v. Sims, Chief Justice Earl
Warren wrote, "The right to vote freely for the candidate of
one's choice is of the essence of a democratic society, and
any restrictions on that right strike at the heart of
representative government."

It is as true today as it was then. Yet, as we learned in November, our democracy remains a work in progress.

We are all familiar with what happened in Florida:

- Outdated voting machines and confusing ballots;
- Too few poll workers with too little training.
- Voters who ruined their ballots and were denied replacements.
- Reports of voter intimidation and police checkpoints set up near voting precincts.

We saw what could go wrong in Florida. But the truth is, it could have happened anywhere.

So we should take this rare opportunity, when the public is focused on election issues, to strengthen our democracy.

Our voting procedures and equipment need to be brought into the 21st century.

Our Secretary of State, Matt Blunt, has created a special commission to lead Missouri's election reform effort. But we need national leadership as well.

The Constitution calls for a decentralized system that puts states in charge of elections. But the federal government can do more to encourage and empower states to improve the voting process.

As we move forward, I ask that we look closely at critical issues, including:

- Implementing uniform statewide standards;

- Upgrading current election systems and technology;
- Increasing voter education;
- Improving voter access and procedures for disabled voters; and
- Protecting the voting rights of our nation's military personnel.

This is not a partisan issue. Many of the proposals from Republicans and Democrats are very similar. We can agree on the need for experts to study the problems and recommend solutions. We can agree on increased funding for state and local governments to modernize voting equipment. And I am optimistic that we can find even more common ground.

We need to approach this issue thoughtfully but expeditiously.

A study should inform our actions, not delay our actions.

Our goal is not just to fix voting machines, but to restore faith in our democratic system. Because ultimately, our democracy depends on public confidence in our elections. If we want a healthy democracy – an example for all the world – we must act together in the spirit of bipartisanship to ensure that the mistakes of the past are not repeated.

I thank my colleagues, and I have a number of questions for the Secretaries of State who are here today.